

Ocean Born Mary House  
Approx. 1 mi. S of Rt. 202  
Henniker  
Merrimack County  
New Hampshire

HABS No. NH-160

HABS  
NH,  
7-HEN,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

OCEAN-BORN-MARY HOUSE

HABS No. NH-160

HABS  
NH,  
7-HEN  
2-

Location: Approx. 1 mile south of Route 202, Southwestern part of town of Henniker, Merrimack County, New Hampshire.

Present Owner: David C. and Connie A. Russell, Henniker, N.H.

Present Occupant: David C. and Connie A. Russell and L.M.A. Roy

Present Use: Private Residence and museum during summer months.

Significance: The highly academic and imposing quality of the overall form, roof, and elevation of the house is very unusual in this rural locality; it most closely resembles the sophisticated pre-Revolutionary houses of Portsmouth. It was built by a son of the legendary Ocean Born Mary (see Part I, section B).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Robert Wallace until 1815. Robert M. Wallace until 1831 [Merrimack County Registry of Deeds, v. 23, p. 178]. Ephriam Morrill until 1833 (33, 273). Elisha Morrill until 1833 (34, 63). Charles Eastman until 1834 (36, 469). Washington Berry until 1865 (39, 179). Harris and Martha Campbell until 1873 (213, 257). James H. Dowlin until 1900 (339, 282). Sidney J. Dowlin until 1917 (436, 17). Mrs. Flora E. Roy and L.M.A. Roy until 1961. David and Connie Russell to date.
2. Date of erection: Probably between 1776 (date of Robert Wallace's marriage) and 1786 (year of his last term in the legislature which sat in Portsmouth and Exeter). [Leander W. Cogswell, History of the Town of Henniker, Concord, 1880, pp. 756-7]. The popular tradition is that the house was built c.1767, as stated by J. M. Howells, The Architectural Heritage of the Merrimack, New York, 1941, p. 224.
3. Architect: Unknown. Perhaps it was Robert Wallace himself, as he was familiar with Portsmouth architecture through his terms in the legislature.

4. Original plans, construction: None known. No papers or documents of Robert Wallace (1749-1815) have as yet been located.
5. Alterations and additions: House originally (or in the early 19th c.) had a projecting ell to the rear [Personal interview with L.M.A. Roy]. Partially restored and painted by L.M.A. Roy, 1917 and after. Further attempts at partial restoration undertaken by David Russell, 1961 - and later. Mr. Russell has installed a quasi-modern kitchen in northwest corner, ground floor room. House in general not very altered from period of construction, but is in poor condition.
6. Important old views: none known.

B. Historical Context:

1. Prior to 1720, families of Scotch yeomen settled in Londonderry, Ireland. James Wilson and his young wife went from there to settle in Londonderry, N.H. and sailed to Boston in July 1720. James Wilson was going to lands allotted to him as one of the grantees of the town. [Edward L. Parker, History of Londonderry, Boston, 1851, pp. 305, 308]. One evening, about one third of the way across, the ship was taken by pirates, and all valuables gathered into parcels on the deck. The robber captain, going in search of the officers' cabin, saw a young woman lying in her berth with a newborn baby and said that he would leave the ship unharmed if the mother would name the girl Mary, after his own wife. The pirate crew left the ship, but the captain returned with a piece of brocaded silk, asking that the child should wear it on her wedding day. The immigrants reached Boston safely, and, on the day of her marriage to James Wallace in 1742 [Cogswell, History of Henniker, p. 756; Parker, History of Londonderry, p. 305, Londonderry Vital Records], Ocean Born Mary wore the Pirate's silk. Ocean Born Mary lived to be 94 and is buried in the Center of Burying ground at Henniker. She had four sons and one daughter; her second son, Robert, moved to Henniker in 1774, married in 1776 and built the "Ocean Born Mary House", so-called because Mary lived there from 1798 until her death.

Robert was the most successful of all the Wallace boys. He was selectman of Henniker (1779-91), Justice of the Peace, Town moderator, State Representative (1783-86), State Councillor and delegate from Henniker to the state convention in Concord to frame a constitution for New Hampshire. He also rose to high military office in the Revolutionary War. [Stearns, Ezra S., Genealogical and Family History of the State of New Hampshire, N.Y. & Chicago, 1908, p. 248].

2. There have been many legends and stories spread about the supernatural aspects of the house and its protecting apparitions. Most, if not all, of this is pure myth, invented and disseminated by L.M.A. Roy.

Prepared by:  
Charles B. Wood, III  
N.H. Historical Society  
March 1964